Muslim-Christian Relationship: In the context of status of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

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Abstract:

The question of the status of Prophet Muhammad has been one of the most crucial and controversial issue of Muslims-Christian relations since the advent of Islam. In almost every Muslim-Christian encounter, the question of Christian acknowledgement of prophet-hood of Muhammad has been raised. Muslim ask, when we accept and regard Jesus as a prophet, why you (Christian) do not recipro-cate by giving the same status to prophet Muhammad.The present study is an attempt to analyze the points which Kenneth Cragg has raised, In response of the Muslims, who say, why the Christian don't give such respect to Muhammad(SAW) as the Muslim give to Jesus. In this study I proved that Cragg's answer is not only against the Holy Quran but also against The teachings of Gospel and the only reason for this disregard Is prejudicial and polemical.

***Key words**: comparative theology, Muhammad(SAW), oreintalism, Kenneth Cragg, theology of religion.*

Christianity continuously uses polemical ways against Prophet Muhammad from the early days of his prophet-hood. The pages of history are definite proof of their false accusation over Prophet Muhammad. Even the civilized world of today is also involved in these polemic activities with a slogan of 'freedom of journalism'. But in opposition Muslims never use a single word of dishonesty 3 against the personality of Jesusعلیہ سلام.The Muslim believe and regard all the prophets of Allah.(1)

The world of today is very different from past. Technology has reduced the distances. Today's world is not a unipolar world but it is a multi-dimensional society, where the people of all religions live together. So the importance of inter-faith dialogue has arisen. When we say inter-faith dialogue mostly its meaning is dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The peace of the world

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depends on their positive dialogue. The Pause or a negative approach in this dialogue can cause a lot of problems and also is a great risk for world peace. The history of crusade, the war against Iraq and Afghanistan and the so called war on terror is an eminent example. So the peace lovers from both sides try their best to bring close the followers of Christianity and Islam. For this purpose many societies conducted dialogues, seminars and debates. But all these efforts ended on one question, which Muslims asked form Christians, why they do not give such respect to prophet Muhammad as the Muslim give to Jesus. Such a situation was faced by a renowned Christian Kenneth Cragg* when he attended a seminar which

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* Kenneth Cragg was an Anglican Bishop, scholar, an orientalist and an ambassador of Muslim Christian relation. He was born in England in 1913 and died in 2012.He got his doctoral degree from Oxford. He spent most of his time in Middle East. He deeply studied the Holy Quran and Arabic language. He remained the auditor of the research Journal "The Muslim world" from 1952 to 1960 after the death of Zwemer. He wrote more than sixty books and hundreds of articles, most of them are on Islam. His most prominent books on Islam are, The Call of the Minaret,The Sandals at the Mosque, The Mind of the Quran, The Events of the Quran,The reading in the Quran,Muhammad andtheChristian, Jesus and the Muslim,Returning to Mount Hira,The Quran and the West, etc

was conducted by the President of Libya Qaddafi in Tripoli 1n 1975. Kenneth Cragg narrated this event as:

"There is an issue that disturbs the Muslims more than any other in their approach to the Christians, wrote a participant in the 1975 seminar convened at Tripoli, Libya, by President Qaddafi, to bring together representatives from the great Islamic University, Al-Azhar in Cairo, and from the Vatican and else-where, It is, he went on, the silence and reserve of Christians regarding Muhammad. He is for Muslims the last and greatest of the Prophets. Christian reticence on this subject surprised and scandalizes them. They do not understand why we refuse to grant Muhammad the respect they themselves grant to the person of Jesus". (2)

Cragg tried to answer this question in his book "Muhammad and The Christian" and also made it clear that it is a response of a single Christian who is loyal to Christ and this answer should not be consider the response to the whole Christianity.

"It is the aim of this study to offer at least one Christian's view of a resolution of the problem, a resolution which no more than tentative, remains loyal to Christian criteria while outlining a positive response to Muhammad."(3)

Now we analyze the points which Cragg has discussed to show why Christians do not respect Muhammad such as Muslim regard Christ.

First reason:

According to Cragg the first reason is that, the Muslims demand from Christian to accept Muhammad the prophet of God without any debate or inquiry. Cragg said

"Among Muslims, in the main apostolate of Muhammad is not for Debate or inquiry, but for acceptance. Islam as the name implies, presupposes unreserved commitment....Here is the first hurdle the Christian has to take in determining a Christian attitude to Muhammad and which the Muslim has to take in engaging with the other's response. Neither has an easy or a congenial task. Both can quickly fall or fail at the first hurdle." (4)

It is not a justice because the Holy Quran, the Sunnah of the Holy prophet and Sirah is full of such events when the people of Arabs and the foreigner fully inquired about the Holy prophet. There is no compulsion in Islam to accept the prophet-hood of Muhammad without debate or inquiry. Instead to it, Islam emphasizes to research of Muhammad and if you find something wrong never accept Him. In the early days of Islam, the infidels of Makkah blamed the Holy prophet (SAW) that you are proclaiming lie about God that he has sent revelation and the Quran is the word of God. God set forth the example of the life of Holy prophet before them that you are witness, he never told a lie, He has spent his life among you.(5)

Makkah was the center of Arab, people from all over the Arabian Peninsula came here for pilgrimage. In the early days of His prophet hood, infidels of Makkah warned these foreigners not to meet Muhammad because He was a magician and soothsayer. This made them crazy and they met the Holy prophet and after fully inquiring about Muhammad they not only rejected the accusation of the infidels but also accepted Islam.(5.A)

Warkah bin Nofil was a Christian; he was a renowned scholar of Torah and Gospel. After the first revelation, Hazarat Khadejah(رضی اللہ عنہا)took the Holy prophet to Warakah, after listening the prophet Warakah said:

"This is the same angle which revealed on Moses, Oh if I would be a young and alive when your people will dislocate you from your home town. The Holy prophet said: will they dislocate me from here. Warakah said: yes there was not a single person who brought thing like you and had not faced enmity".(6)

The Holy prophet wrote a preaching letter to Ceaser of Rome (Harqqul),he called the Abu Sufyan for investigation. He asked many question about the personality, race, dealing with people , His followers and the teaching of the Holy Prophet. After this Harrqqul said if it is true what you said, then he will be the owner of this place. I knew that there would be a prophet but did not know that He will be in Arab, if I can reach I will meet Him and wash His feet.(7)

The Holy prophet wrote another letter to the King of Abyssinia Najashi (Ashama).After receiving letter, for inquiry he called upon the Muslims which had migrated to Abyssinia, and asked about the Holy Prophet. Hazarat Jafir (RA)said: oh king ,we were Idol worshiper, ate dead animal,… then Almighty Allah sent a prophet, Who is prominent for Truthfulness, purity,and honesty. He preached us for the worship of God and forbade us to worship idols. After this Hazarat JafIr recited Surah Marrayam and the Najashi started weeping and said these verses and those which revealed on Jesus were same.(8)After this Najashi sent a delegation to Makkah for inquiry. This delegation met the Holy prophet at Baitu- Allah and asked many questions and at last accepted Islam.(9)

This study about Prophet Muhammad was not of a single person but of a panel. Haruqqal and Najashi had all the resources of inquiry and they used them and both declared that the Holy prophet Muhammad was the true prophet of Allah.

In 9th Hijrah a delegation from Najran came to Madina for inquiry. They debated with the Holy Prophet. They asked many questions about the personality of Jesus, the Holy prophet( )answered them but they did not agree and asked for Mubahala. The Holy prophet went home and brought his grandsons Hazarat Hasan and Hazarat Hussain. The Christian consulted with each other and said that he is a true prophet, so do not challenge Him. They requested the Holy prophet to forgive them. [(10)]

These and many other events show that Islam does not create hurdle to investigate the personality of Muhammad instead of it Islam encourages those people who use their mind and heart for a positive research of Muhammad and Islam .In the Quran Allah Almighty enforced the people for Tadabur,(to think and analyze).[(11)]

There is another strong reason which negates the Cragg's view. In the sequel of Prophets, Hazarat Muhammad was the only prophet whose Sirah is protected. It is a challenge for the accuser to underline a single action of the Holy Prophet which is against His status. It is the personality of Muhammad on which most books are written and is being written. The person who has arisen this point, Kenneth Cragg has also written many books especially, Muhammad in the Quran, Muhammad and the Christian, Returning to Mount Hira, The weight in the word. If Muslims do not allow anyone to inquire about Muhammad then how can we find such a number of books on life of Muhammad in almost all the languages of the world. So this accusation of Cragg or any Christian is not valid, Muslims do not restrict any one on inquiring the personality and the teachings of the Holy prophet (SAW).

Second reason:

Cragg says that the second reason is that, the Christianity based on that God in Christ and Islam is strongly condemned it. For this rejection the whole castle of Christianity will be demolished. In this Scenario, how can Christian regard Muhammad as a prophet?

"A sharply disparate theology follows from this Quranic elimination of what Paul describes as "God in Christ" if it does not also precede it....Such harsh disallowance of Jesus as the Christ raises quite crucial questions for faith and loyalty. Christians find it as insuperable veto on their sense of God". [(12)]

Cragg's this point is against the fact because he demands from Muslims which is also against Christianity. He does not demand what Christ said but demands what Paul said. The Christianity which Islam regards is the Christianity of Jesus not the Christianity of Paul. The above Citation of Cragg also shows the present Christianity is that which Paul said but not Jesus. According to Arnold Mayer:

"If the Christianity we understand faith in Christ as the heavenly Son of God who did not belong to earthly humanity, but who live In the divine likeness

and glory, who come down from heaven to earth, who entered into humanity and took upon Himself a human form that he might make propitiation for men's sin by His own blood upon the Cross…if this is Christianity, then such Christianity was founded Principally by St. Paul and not by our Lord". (13)

It is correct what Arnold said because the teaching of Jesus was also the oneness of God. Jesus never said to worship Him and never demanded for His son-ship. There are many verses in Bible which show that the teaching of Jesus is for oneness of God. For example

"One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."(14)

"Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him." (15)

In the Gospel there are many verses which show that Jesus considered Himself the son of man not the Son of God "Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. A scribe then approached and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."(16)

But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he then said to the paralytic—'Stand up, take your bed and go to your home. (17)

In the Gospel the word "Son" is not only used for Jesus but also for other people, like Adam,(18) and also as reformer.(19) The word son is also used in Gospel for purity and truth fullness. In the Gospel of Mark it is said that this man is the son of God (20) but for the same event it is stated in the Gospel of Luke this is the man of truth.

These and many other references of New Testament show that Jesus was not a Son of God or some divinity in Him. The teaching of Islam also shows that Esa was not a son of God but the man of God. The first word which Esa spoke after birth was about the oneness of God and his prophet-hood.

قَالَ اِنِّیْ عَبْدُ اللہ اٰتٰنِیَ الْکِتٰبَ وَ جَعَلَنِیْ نَبِیًّا (21)

Jesus preached for the worship of God but not his own. (22) So we can say that the teaching of Gospel and Quran totally rejected the Son ship and divinity of Jesus and the whole of Christianity is also not united on this point, then how can Cragg or other Christian can demand for Muslims to accept divinity of Jesus or the son of God.

Third reason:

Cragg said Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the last and final prophet of God and the Muslim gave this title to the person of Muhammad than how can we accept and regard Him.

"Accordingly, it has long been a Christian difficulty to acknowledge the later when it is inconsistent with the earlier, given the conviction that the earlier is itself final and definitive. How can one ascribe authenticity to that which so confidently purports to displace, or otherwise improve upon, the Word made flesh? One would seem to be attributing confusion, or worse, to the Holy Spirit, by any positive attitude to Muhammad, and to be left with no Christian option but to regard the Quran as imposture. So the Christian centuries since have too often and too crudely thought. This has been one of the main reasons for the sad closeness of the Quran to generations of Christian minds or, if open at all, its polemical reception."(23)

It is not a reason but only an excuse for the rejection of the last prophet. Cragg had not mentioned any reference from the Bible which shows that Jesus was the last and final prophet of God. But in opposition there are many references in the Bible which show that Jesus told his followers that a helper will come after Him, who will remain with you forever.(24)This person will be from God ,sign of truth and witness to me.(25) He will not come when I shall not go.(26) The Holy Quran also confirms these teaching of Jesus. The only prophet came after Jesus is Muhammad. According to Holy Quran Jesus said.(27)The Holy prophet confirm not only Jesus but all other prophets of God.(28)The Quran remind the Christians and Jews the above citations of the bible and said that the both have a written proof about Al-Rasool,Al-Nabi, Al-Ummi (The illiterate Prophet).(29) They recognized the Holy prophet as their sons. (30)

There are many Christians Monk who confirmed that Muhammad was the last prophet and He was the person whose signs we found in the Old and New testament, like Monk Buharah,Zurar,Timmam,Daress(31),Nastora,(32) Wrakah bin Nofil,(33) Najashi, Huruqqul and the Najaran delegation.(34) Instead of Bible there are many references in the Quran which confirm that the Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet of God.(35)

Muhammad is the last prophet of God also for these reasons:

A-The teaching of the last prophet must be protected for the guidance of the humanity. Only the teaching of Prophet Muhammad is protected. (36)

B-The teaching of the last prophet must be universal. Only the teaching of Prophet Muhammad is universal. (37)

C-The teaching of the last prophet must be the capacity of innovation, so that it can give the proper solution of the upcoming problems. So only Islam has the capacity to provide solution of the present and upcoming problems. To solve these problems Islam has given Assol e Arba (four rules),the Holy Quran, Sunnah of the Holy prophet ,Ijmah and Qias(Ijtihad).No other religion has the capacity to solve the problems in this way.

D-The teaching of the last prophet must be comprehensive, which can guide the whole humanity in all the fields of this world and the world hereafter. Islam is the only religion which provides guidance in all fields like science, economics, sociology, civil and criminal issues, the outer and inner problems of man etc. So we can say that Islam is the only religion which can provide full religious and worldly guidance.

Fourth Reason:

Cragg says that it is impossible for the Christian to regard Muhammad as a prophet and a political leader because it is against the teaching of New Testament.

"It is a conscience firm in the conviction that its acknowledgement of Muhammad rests on authentically Christian/Biblical grounds and that its instinct to make central the power-question is what the New Testament vitally requires of it. It may thus by claim to be loyal to Christ no less by what it welcomes than by what it disavows."(38)

All the prophets preached his people, in return they face hardships. They face these hardships with courage and patience and did not use force but when Muhammad faced this situation He used force against His opponents, Cragg said

"To the Christian mind, nurtured by Jesus and the Gospels, it will always be burden and a tragedy that force has been so uncomplicatedly enshrined in the very canons of Islam via the pattern of the sirah. For that sufficient reason, any appreciation of Muhammad in situ must resolutely retain the contrasted meaning of the love that suffers as the Christ."(39)

Due to this political and military factor in Islam it is very difficult for Christian to regard Muhammad. According to Cragg

"The military dimensions of original Islam and its uninhibited embrace of the political arm are certainly crucial factors in deterring the Christian from a positive response to Muhammad." (40)

It is a common phenomenon of the orientalists from the polemical period that they think that Islam believes on the use of power. Most of them say that the expansion of Islam is due to use of power. Cragg says that prophet Muhammad gave priority to power instead to face hardships. He used force against those people who refused to accept Him. While the other prophets of God faced hardships and did not use force against their opponent, especially Jesus Christ.

If we study the Sirah (Biography of Prophet)and the history of Islam we come to know that the Holy prophet faced more hardships than any other prophet of Allah. The whole Makkan period is full of hardship, even the Makkan planned to kill the Holy prophet but after eight years when the Holy prophet conquered Makkah most of them were present, the Holy prophet did not take revenge but forgave them, (41) is it a politics or prophet-hood?

Cragg gave example the massacre of Banu Qurazah.(42) But it is clear that their massacre was due to treachery which they did during the war of ditch and the punishment which they faced was according to the Old testament which they accepted.(43)Cragg also differentiate between the Maccan and Median period, He says that in Mecca the Holy prophet faced hardships like other prophets but in Medina He became a ruler and used force against his opponents, but in opposition Jesus only faced hardships and accepted Cross and did not conquered Jerusalem.(44)

In the life of Holy prophet there is no difference between Meccan and Median period. Muhammad was prophet in Macca and also in Medina. It is correct to say that Medina provides a platform where the Holy prophet

implemented the Islamic laws. The war of the Holy prophet was not for expansion but only for self defense. The Holy prophet was not the only prophet who had a political power but the Biblical prophets like Moses, David and Sulaiman also use of force against the infidels. All the prophets obeyed the rules of God and not their own wishes. In Islam politics is a religious matter.(45)So Cragg's term politicization of Islam is not correct because it means that basically Islam has no political guidance it was the Holy prophet who politicized it for their own means. In fact in Islam there is no difference between politics and religion, Islam has set the use of power under the guidance of religion. So it is correct to say that Islam has Religionising the politics.

Cragg misunderstood Islam's merging of religious faith with worldly power or politics, because he used Christian grounds for accusing Muhammad (SAW) of using political means to gain religious strength. According to Cragg no one can justify the threat of power for religion. I believe that Cragg misidentifies the power or political dimension of Muhammad's militancy. He has seen or try to shown only one side of the picture, the political aspect of Prophet Muhammad, and ignored the important one the prophet-hood of Muhammad. It is correct to say that Muhammad (SAW)was a statesman but he remained, from first to last, a prophet, who never compromised over his religious principles. Muhammad was not only a statesman but he was also successful trader, an ambassador of religious harmony and peace, a shepherd, a commander, a philosopher and a thinker etc, but most of all he was a prophet.

Fifth reason:

Cragg says that if according to the demand of Muslims, we the Christian regard Muhammad as prophet then it will be very difficult for us to respect Muhammad as Christ because Muhammad is only a prophet according to the Muslims and the Christ is Son of God which is more than a prophet. Cragg said

"We are saying that a Christian verdict freely perceives Muhammad's destiny with truth and by the same Christian discernment takes issue with the rest. It does so, for the double reason that rejection of truth has deeper reaches of evil than such victory touches and that their lives in the Gospel of Christ a different precedent of Prophetic word and wounds-so different that we call it no longer only prophet-hood but Son- ship". [(46)]

According to Islam Jesus preached the oneness of God like all prophets. He never said for His worship or a partner to God or son of God. The son-ship, incarnation, atonement, Trinity etc all these beliefs of Christianity does not belong to the teaching of Jesus but it starts from Paul and in 325 BC the council of Nicaea, the deity of Christ received Official sanction. [(47)] .The Bible and the Quran have many verses which show that Jesus preached the oneness of God. According to the Gospel of Mark Jesus said

Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one [(48)] and the Quran prove that

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُواْ إِنَّ اللّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اعْبُدُواْ اللّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ مَن يُشْرِكْ بِاللّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللّهُ عَلَيهِ الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنصَارٍ (49)

According to Gospel Jesus was born from a woman,(50) brought up in natural way(51) according to the Christian belief Crucified (52). A person who felt hunger and thrist(53) .Do these qualities belong to God or the Son of God or the incarnated God? For these reasons the Nestorius said:"God is not a baby two or three month old."(54)

In the Gospel there are many events which reject the divinity of Jesus. In the last time when the enemies surrounded Jesus, He was frightened and worried and prayed for His safety.(55) According to the Christian the Jesus not only crucified but also faced a helpless and degraded death.

Is it a Son-ship? The Holy Quran also rejected the concept of son-ship and the divinity of Jesus. According to Quran Jesus said I am a man and His prophet.(57) Jesus not ordered his worship but for the worship of one God.(58)They are infidels who said that Jesus is God or son of God.(59) God never adopted a son.(60)

The moderate Christian also rejected the son-ship of Jesus.

"He could feel hunger and thirst. He could feel joy, sorrow, love, pity and even anger. He prayed to God like any other man, especially in the crises of his life. He was tempted. He shrank from the prospect of death….He confessed ignorance. It is the picture of a man. (61)

"In the synoptic Gospels, the expression 'Son of God' is really a Messianic designation, is rather used for Jesus than by Him of Himself."

"In his teaching Jesus does not describe himself as God, and speaks of God as another."(62)

Harnack said:"The sentence:I am the Son of God, was not inserted in the Gospel by Jesus himself, and to put that sentence there side by side with the others is to make an addition to the Gospel."(63)

The reference No:13 of Arnold Meyer must be read again ,who has cleared the Christianity of Jesus and the Christianity of today and their faiths.So, all the above citation show that Jesus was not a deity or son of God .He was only a prophet of God. Cragg's term 'More than a prophet 'is totally wrong according to the Gospel, the Holy Quran and the faithful Christians.

The questions or points which Cragg's has raised above are not a serious or scholarly. Every religion provides and demands prestige for its religious leader. Muhammad was not the personality of pre- Historical age whose life is wrapped with the darkness of ignorance. Muhammad belongs to the age of History. Every aspect of His life is clear like day light, everyone can examine and analyze it. If any point which Cragg has cited above is valid then we can say that Cragg or other Christians are right not to regard Muhammad. But as we analyzed above that these reasons do not justify their claim. Then we can say that it is only a prejudice or polemic behaviour which stop Christian to regard Muhammad. The

respect or prestige of Muhammad does not depend on Christian's or other's positive response, it is God who Himself said:

وَرَفَعْنَا لَکَ ذِکْرَکَ (٦٤)

It is better for Muslims, for Christian and for the whole world to regard all the prophets and the religious leader. This will create social harmony and world peace.

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